

★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

## Katherine Harris

1957–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

REPUBLICAN FROM FLORIDA

2003–

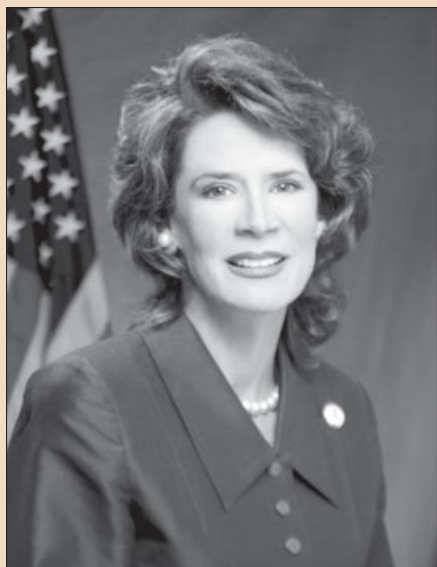


Image courtesy of the Member

**THE 2000 PRESIDENTIAL BALLOT RECOUNT IN FLORIDA** thrust Katherine Harris into the national spotlight in her role as the state's chief election officer, but it also obscured her meteoric career and deep political roots. Having worked to bring business into Florida both as a state senator and as secretary of state, Harris won election to the House in 2002 and secured seats on the influential Financial Services, International Relations, and Homeland Security committees.

Katherine Harris was born on April 5, 1957, at the Key West Naval Base in Florida, to George Walter Harris, a banking executive, and Harriett Griffin Harris. Katherine Harris is the granddaughter of Ben Hill Griffin, Jr., a citrus magnate and Democratic state senator. She attended Bartow High School and graduated in 1979 from Agnes Scott College with a B.A. in history; she later earned an MPA from Harvard in 1996. After graduating from college, Harris worked as a marketing executive for a major computer corporation and then served as vice president of a Sarasota commercial real estate company. In 1996, she married Anders Ebbeson, a business executive, and they raised one child, Louise. Harris decided to enter politics in 1994 when she made a successful run for the Florida state senate. During her four years as a state legislator, she chaired the commerce and economic development committee. In 1998, Harris successfully ran for the Florida secretary of state post and was responsible primarily for handling corporate filings and implementing state election procedures. She used her office to attract international business, the arts, and historic preservation into the state. In 2000, she was named the Florida co-chair for the George W. Bush presidential campaign. Harris garnered national attention as Florida's top election official during the state's historic ballot recount which eventually decided the election in George W. Bush's favor by a slender margin. In 2002, she published a book about the experience, *Center of the Storm*.

In 2002, when five-term GOP Representative Dan Miller retired from Florida's west central gulf coast district seat encompassing much of Sarasota and Bradenton, Harris declared her candidacy. Harris had the advantage of a longtime connection to the area as a patron of the arts and civic philanthropist. She won the GOP primary by more than a 2–1 margin. Harris, who faced Democratic challenger Jan Schneider, ran on a general election platform that broadly supported the George W. Bush administration's war on terror, including increased defense spending. Harris backed tax cuts, school vouchers, and medical savings accounts. She also opposed U.S. funding for United Nations family planning programs.<sup>1</sup> In the general election she defeated Schneider by a margin of 55 percent to 45 percent.<sup>2</sup>

In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), Harris received committee assignments on Financial Services and International Relations. She had three subcommittee appointments for Financial Services: Capital Markets, Insurance and Government Sponsored Enterprises; Housing and Community Opportunity; and Domestic and International Monetary Policy, Trade and Technology. Harris also held two subcommittee assignments on the International Relations Committee. She served as vice chair of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee and also held a seat on the Middle East and Central Asia Subcommittee. The leadership also tapped her for a seat on the Republican Policy Committee and made her an Assistant Whip. In the 109th Congress (2005–2007), she also received a seat on the Homeland Security Committee.

During the first year of her freshman term, Harris supported the overhaul of the Medicare program and the creation of a prescription drug benefit, as well as a measure to outlaw the partial-birth abortion procedure except in cases where it was used to save a woman's life. She sponsored the American Dream Downpayment Act, a program to help low-income families and individuals purchase their first home, which was signed into law by President Bush in December 2003. Key provisions of her "Carlie's Law" legislation, making any sexual crime or crime against children a crime of violence for the first time ever, can be found in the Children's Safety and Violent Crimes Act, which has passed the House. Harris voted for a \$330 billion tax cut between 2003 and 2013 and backed a budget resolution that called for \$1.3 trillion in tax cuts over 10 years. Also in line with her campaign promises, she supported a measure to create a pilot private school voucher program in Washington, D.C., that supporters hoped would become the basis for a national program.<sup>3</sup> In 2004, Harris won re-election, defeating Schneider by a similar margin, 55 to 45 percent.<sup>4</sup>

#### FOR FURTHER READING

*Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress*, "Katherine Harris," <http://bioguide.congress.gov>

Harris, Katherine. *Center of the Storm: Practicing Principled Leadership in Times of Crisis* (Nashville, TN: WND Books, 2002).

#### NOTES

1 Manuel Riog-Franzia, "The Last Laugh: Florida's Katherine Harris Knows About Winning Elections. Just Count the Ballots," 19 October 2002, *Washington Post*: C1.

2 "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," <http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/elections.html>.

3 *Politics in America*, 2004 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2003): 243.

4 "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," <http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/elections.html>.